FAITH IN PREDESTINATION

(Qada Wa Qadar)

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INTRODUCTION

Belief in pre-destination (Qada wa Qadar) is an undisputed article of faith in Islam. For some people, this belief leads to contentment and satisfaction, even in the face of hardship and adversity. But for others, it provides justification for their wrongdoings: how often do we hear people arguing that they should not be blamed for their disobedience since it has already been decreed by Allah that they will sin?

The following two articles in this booklet attempt to answer those people who genuinely wonder whether Man has any control over his actions in this life or whether he is forced to do everything that he does.

The first article was originally compiled in Arabic by Shaikh Muhammad Ibn Salih Al-Uthaimin, a renowned scholar from Saudi Arabia; the second was a reply by Mr. Adil Salahi to a question which appeared on the religious pages of the daily "Arab News" of Jeddah.

It is hoped that this booklet will help to clarify the difficult issue of pre-destination.

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PRE-DESTINATION AND THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MAN

In this article, we want to deal with an important matter that concerns all Muslims: decree and pre-destination by Allah (Qada and Qadar), a subject which has been a point of contention for scholars throughout the ages. It has been reported that the Messenger of Allah once found his Companions arguing about Qadar. He forbade them from indulging in such a debate and told them that communities before them had been destroyed for that reason.

However, by the grace of Allah, our pious ancestors were able to understand the issue and form a moderate view based on equity and justice. In their understanding, the issue of Qada and Qadar stems from the Unity of Allah's attribute of Cherishing (Tawhid ar-Rububiyah). This is one of three kinds of Allah's Unity:

1. Unity of Divinity (Tawhid Al-Uluhiyah), which is to direct all forms of worship to Allah alone

2. Unity in the matter of Cherishing the whole universe (Tawhid ar-Rububiyah), which means to believe that all creation, sovereignty and planning belong to Allah.

3. Unity in the matter of Allah's names and attributes.

Faith in pre-estimation is implied by Allah's attribute of nourishing and sustaining the whole universe. Ahmad has said:

"Qadar (pre-estimation) is the power of Allah. It is one of the secrets which no-one except Allah knows, as it has been recorded in the well-guarded tablet. We do not know what Allah has destined, either for or against us or concerning all his creation, except after the event has occurred or has been told by the Prophet himself."

Regarding this issue, the people of the Muslim Ummah have divided into three factions:

1. The first group is so extreme in its attempts to prove preestimation that it has completely deprived man of any power

and any ability to choose. For them, Man has no independence but is coerced into doing all that he does; he is a helpless being, at the mercy of Fate. There is no doubt that this group is wrong. By using our powers of reason and the tenets of our faith, we know that there is a difference between the things that happen without our will and those in which we play an active part.

2. The second group goes to the extreme of attributing complete power and freedom of choice to the individual, at the expense of denying Allah any role in process, by saying that the Almighty does not know of an action until after it has occurred! This view is also mistaken.

3. Allah has guided others to a more moderate and sensible view, and we, the people of the Sunnah and Jama'ah have adopted it because it is based on legal as well as rational evidence. We agree that everything that happens in this universe falls into one of these two categories:

a) The things that Allah does and in which no-one else has any power of

intervention, e.g. the falling of rain, the growth of vegetation, life and death, illness and health.

b) The actions done by all the creatures that have the power of will. These actions are a consequence of their efforts and their choice, a power that has been given to them by Allah. He thus says in the Qur' an:

"To whomever among you wills to go straight." (8 1:28)

"Among you are some that desire this world and some that desire the Hereafter." *(3:152)*

Man knows very well the difference between what he does from his own free will and what he does because of external force. The person who reaches safely the bottom of a flight of stairs knows that this is because he walked down carefully. However, if he is

pushed down from the top, he has no power over how he lands at the bottom. The first instance is an example of choice; the second is clearly one of compulsion. Similarly, a person who suffers from incontinence of urine knows that the urine is passed without his will and that if he did not have this illness, he would be able to control the discharge. The difference between the two requires no further explanation.

It is a mercy of Allah that there are certain actions which are in the voluntary power of the individual but are recorded as if they are not, and so he is not held answerable for them, e.g. actions done out of forgetfulness or during sleep. Allah says in the story of the People of the Cave:

"And We turned them on their right and on their left sides." (18: 18)

The men themselves are turning over, but Allah Almighty attributes their movements to Himself, since a sleeping person has no control over his action. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

"The one who forgets while fasting and eats or drinks, he should complete his fast because Allah is the One who feeds him and gives him the drink."

Thus, actions done in a state of forgetfulness are also treated as if the person is acting outside his own will and are attributed to Allah Himself.

If we were to agree with the first group mentioned earlier (those who give Man no free will whatsoever), we would be distorting the facts. We would not be able to praise someone for his good actions or castigate someone who voluntarily does wrong, because we would have attributed all their actions to the will of Allah. Another dangerous implication of this argument is that the Almighty behaves unjustly if he punishes the disobedient and rewards the good, as He alone is the source of all these actions. Not only is such reasoning nonsensical, but contradictory to the Qur'an as well:

And his companion (angel) will say: "Here is (this Record) ready with me!" (And it will be said): "Both of you throw (Order from Allah to the two angels) into Hell, every stubborn disbeliever (in the Oneness of Allah, in His Messengers, etc.). "Hinderer of good, transgressor, doubter. Who set up another *ilâh* (god) with Allah, then (both of you) cast him in the severe torment." His companion (Satan — devil) will say: "Our Lord! I did not push him to transgress, (in disbelief, oppression, and

evil deeds) but he was himself in error far astray." Allah will say: "Dispute not in front of Me, I had already, in advance, sent you the threat. The Sentence that comes from Me cannot be changed, and I am not unjust (to the least) to the slaves." (50:23-29)

Almighty Allah clearly states that the punishments He inflicts are not cruel but just, since He has already warned His creatures and sent them guidance. He has clearly defined the two paths of piety and disobedience, just as He has defined the consequences of following each path. Man thus has total freedom to choose either path, remembering that if he opts for the path of disobedience, he will not have the excuse of ignorance to offer Allah on the Day of Judgement. The Qur'an says in this regard:

"Messengers as bearers of good news as well as of warning in order that mankind should have no plea against Allah after the Messengers." (4:165)

The Qur'an and reality also refute those who go to the other extreme of giving Man complete freedom of action, leaving no role for Allah. We are told that the will of Man follows the will of Allah:

"To whomever among you wills to go straight. But you shall not

will except as Allah, The Lord of the Worlds, wills." (81:28,29)

"And your Lord creates whatsoever He wills and chooses." (28:68)

"But Allah calls to the home of peace and guides whom He wills to a Straight Path." (10:25)

Those who hold this view are thus rejecting Allah's Omniscience, one of His essential attributes, by effectively claiming that in His Kingdom, there are many things which He does not wish or does not create. But Allah the Magnificent wills everything, creates everything and predestines for everything! It is impossible to conceive of anything happening that He does not wish to happen. This poses problems for us, such as what is the fate of someone whom Allah wishes to misguide? It surely cannot be his fault that he did not receive the message of truth. The answer is that Allah guides those who want to be guided, and misguides those who do not wish to receive guidance. We read this in the Qur' an:

"Then when they turned away (from the Path of Allah), Allah turned their hearts away (from the Right Path)." (6 1:5)

"But because of their breach of their covenant, We cursed them, and made their hearts grow hard: they change the words from their (right) places and have abandoned a good part of the Message that was sent to them." (5:13)

In other words, the wish to be pious emanates from the individual himself, and Allah guides him because of this. The issue can be further explained by comparing it to the acquisition of knowledge or to the earning of a living. Allah has decreed the amount of understanding or wealth a person will be able to acquire in his life. This does not mean that the individual can thus sit at home and wait for the wealth or learning to come walking into his arms: only when he goes out searching for it and works hard for it will he get it. The amount of wealth or learning he receives will be proportional to the effort put in, and this is just as true for guidance. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said in this regard:

"Verily the creation of each one of you is brought together in his mother's belly for forty days in the form of seed, then he is a clot of blood for a like period, then a morsel of flesh for a like period, then there is sent to him the angel who blows the breath of life into him and who is commanded about four matters: to write down his means of livelihood, his life span, his actions, and whether happy or unhappy." (It was related by Bukhari and Muslim.)

Just as we make all conceivable sacrifices for the nourishment of the stomach, so should we work hard for the sustenance of the soul. When ill, we are prepared to travel the world in search of a doctor who can cure us, but when our souls are diseased, we leave them to rot, waiting for Allah to send down guidance on a plate!

The correct opinion is thus that there are many routes open to the discretion of Man, and it is up to him to choose the one he wishes to follow. He is like a merchant with many commodities in front of him, and it is his choice which one to trade in. He will obviously pick the one which he thinks will be most profitable. The difference is that the merchant is uncertain and has no guarantee of success; his commodity may have a market and he may make a profit, but he could just as easily lose all his capital.

The believer, on the other hands, is completely sure that if he follows the path of guidance, there will undoubtedly be success and reward waiting for him at the other end because Allah has promised so, for Allah never breaks His word. Similarly, the disbeliever can be sure that only pain and punishment await him at the end of his path.

I would like to add that what has so far been said has been agreed upon and adopted by us, the Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah, as our belief. Man does what he wants, but his will follows that of Allah. We also believe that Allah's will does not act on its own but is strongly linked to His Wisdom, one of His attributes. As a Wise and Just ruler, He decrees guidance for the person who wants guidance and truth, who wishes to be close to Allah, and who aims to follow the Straight Path. For anyone who does not want the truth, Allah decrees error and misguidance; were Islam to be presented to him, his heart would constrict as if he was ascending to the sky *(6:125)*. Allah's Wisdom declines to offer guidance to such a person unless the person changes his attitude.

The Ahlus Sunnah wal Jama'ah say that Allah's decree and predestination has four components. The first is Knowledge: Man must believe with total certainty that Allah has knowledge of everything; He knows the minute as well as the general details of all that happens, whether it is of His own doing or of His creatures.

The second constituent of Qadar is Writing. Allah has written all His knowledge of the fate of His creatures in the Preserved Tablet, as He tells us in the Qur'an:

"Know you not that Allah knows all that is in heaven and on earth? Indeed it is (all) in the Book (Al-Lauh Al.-Mahfuz), and that is easy for Allah." (22:70)

In one Hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) is reported to have said:

"Indeed the first thing that Allah created was the pen. He said, 'Write!' It said, 'What should I write?' Allah said, 'Write down everything that is going to happen.' So at that moment flowed everything that would happen until the Day of Judgement." At this the Prophet was asked whether the actions we do are new

actions or are actions that have been decreed already. He replied:

"They are already decreed." The Companions said: "0 Prophet of Allah, should we then not do and just depend?" He said: "Do, and everything that was created for you will be made easy." The Prophet added: "Do, 0 my brother, do and what was created for you will be facilitated for you." Then followed the words of the Almighty:

As for him who gives (in charity) and keeps his duty to Allah and fears Him, and believes in the best, We will make smooth for him the path of ease (goodness). But he who is greedy miser and thinks himself self-sufficient, and gives lie to the best, We will make smooth for him the path for evil. ***(92:5-10)***

The third component of Qadar is that of Will. Allah wills the presence or absence of everything in the heavens and in the earth. Nothing can exist without His Will. This is reiterated in the Qur' an:

"To whomever among you wills to go straight. But you shall not will except as Allah, the Lord of the Worlds, wills." (81:28,29)

"If your Lord had so willed, they would not have done it." (6:112)

"If Allah had willed, they would not have fought each other; but Allah does what He likes." ***(2:253)***

Allah also relates that His actions always yield to His own Will:

"And if We had willed, surely We would have given every person his guidance." (32: 13)

"And if your Lord had so willed, He could surely have made mankind one nation." (11:118)

Thus, true faith is not complete unless we believe that Allah's Will is total and all-embracing.

The fourth component of Qadar is Creation. This means that we believe that Allah is the Creator of everything and anything, even Death, although it is the absence of Life. The Qur'an says:

"He Who has created death and life, that He may test you which of you is best in deed." (67:2)

The skies, the mountains, the winds, the vapours, the growth of living organisms, the droughts — all are the creation of Allah.

A difficulty arises: how can we claim that our actions and words are products of our own free will when they are in fact creations of Allah? The answer is that our actions and utterances are the result of our ability and desire to do them. Since Allah alone is the one who created us and gave us the ability and the will to distinguish, choose, and act, our actions are His creations; He created the cause which generates the result, so He is the creator of the result as well as of the cause. But, this does in no way belittle our choice and will. For example, fire burns. The One who gave this power to fire is Allah, as fire on its own does not have the capability to burn. We see an instance of this in the Qur' an:

We (Allah) said: "0 fire! be you cool, and safety for Ibrahim!" (21:69)

Thus the fire did not burn Ibrahim in this case. It is Allah who gives fire the power to burn, just as He gives Man the power to choose and act according to his decision.

Finally, I would like to say that were it not for the increasing number of questions that have been raised about this issue and the ensuing controversy, we would not have entered into the debate. However, we felt there was a need for clarification and so spoke out.

I ask Allah Almighty to facilitate the good actions that have been decreed for His pious creatures and to record for us and for them righteousness in this world and in the next. All Praise is due to the Lord of the Universe. May the peace and blessings of Allah be upon our Prophet Muhammad, on his family and on all his Companions.

PREDESTINATION AND FREE WILL

Q. A question which has bothered me for some time is whether man acts and behaves according to his own free will or to what has been destined for him by Allah. In other words, is the choice in any given situation completely ours, or is it pre-determined for us? Is there for everyone of us a destiny towards his life, and from which he cannot escape? Or is it true that by our own choices we mould our future?

A. This is a question which really speaks of man's position in relation to Allah. In order to answer it properly, we need to establish a basis for our discussion which takes into account certain essential facts which must be accepted at the outset. Otherwise, there can be no common ground between the one who poses the question and the one who tries to answer it.

These facts are:

1. Allah is the creator of all things, great and small, magnificent and petty, physical and abstract.

2. Allah is just. He administers His justice on the basis of His knowledge.

3. Allah's knowledge is perfect and absolute. He knows the most secret of thoughts in the same way as He knows the most public of events. Nothing escapes His knowledge as He sees all and hears all, without restrictions or impediments.

4. Allah always tells the truth, the plain and complete truth. He never says something and means another. What He says must always be taken at face value, because He does not need to wrap His meaning or to make use ambiguity.

Within the framework which these facts establish, we find that the answer to your question is an easy one. Allah tells us in the Qur'an that every human being accepts the faith or denies it according to his own will. He instructs His messenger to say to people:

And say: ~The truth is from your Lord.' Then whosoever wills, let him believe, and whosoever wills, let him disbelieve. (18:29)

This verse tells us that man chooses for himself whether to believe in Allah or not. This is the most important choice a man ever makes. If he has free choice over this particular question,

then he must have the same over matters which are less serious. We cannot imagine a situation in human life where man can reach a higher stage without passing through a primary one. The sophisticated always includes the elementary. For man to be able to make a choice in a subject which affects all his life, he must have adequate training in exercising his ability to choose in simpler and less serious matters.

Allah also tells that He rewards man according to his actions. Numerous verses in the Qur'an tell us that no action will be allowed to pass unnoticed. For example:

So whosoever does good equal to the weight of an atom (or a

small ant), shall see it. And whosoever does evil equal to the

weight of an atom (or a small ant), shall see it. (99:7,8)

If our actions carry a reward, good or bad, then they must be of our own choosing. If they were imposed on us through predestination, then we cannot be held responsible for them. Otherwise, the divine attribute of justice could not be fulfilled. Suppose you are a shopkeeper and employ an assistant to attend to customers' needs when you are absent. Suppose also that you do not allow your assistant to sell any goods for anything lower than the prices your assistant to sell any goods for anything lower than the prices you have marked. Suppose also that you come to the shop one evening after having been absent all day and your assistant tells you that he tried to reach you everywhere to ask your permission to give a discount of 10 percent to a customer who wanted to buy a very large quantity of goods. When the customer could not get that desired discount, he bought the goods from one of your competitors. Now, if you were to scold, reproach or punish your assistant for not acting in what you may describe as "a responsible manner," you are unfair. He has acted within the restrictions you have imposed on him. You have left him no choice and he should never be punished for not exercising a choice which is not his.

The fact that our actions are either rewarded or punished by Allah means, by logic and necessity, that we have complete control over them. Otherwise, the reward and punishment cannot be fair.

Moreover, Allah has created us and equipped us with an ability to choose. That ability is set into operation and we can see its effects every minute of our lives. You have only to look at what you do and what you omit. When you are awakened by your alarm in the morning, whether you rise and get ready to go to work or you switch it off and go back to sleep is your own choice. If you do the latter and you are reproached by your employer for being late, you do not complain. When you open your wardrobe you choose the shirt and trousers you will wear that day. It is you who decides whether to go to work walking, by your car or to use public transport. No one imposes on you that you should invite your friend to dinner, and when you accept someone else's invitation, that again is your own choice. These are simple matters and I have chosen these examples advisedly. When you realize that it is always your choice that determines what you do in such matters, it is easy to understand that we also exercise a choice in more complicated matters.

A person who does not fast in Ramadhan can never claim that he has made that choice under duress. Nor does the one who fasts accept any suggestion that he is compelled to fast. The same applies to prayers and *zakah,* no matter how much is

said about anyone's need to maintain appearances. Even that is one's own choice. Without this free choice, the whole idea of action and reward becomes impossible. Moreover, it would not fit with Allah's justice. There is no doubt, then, that we have free choice, and we exercise it freely, and we bear the consequences.

What makes this question seem, at times, an intricate one is that people confuse Allah's prior knowledge of everything that may take place in the universe with predestination. We state very clearly that Allah knows what we are going to choose in any situation and what we will do or say before we actually do it or say it. His prior knowledge, however, does not signify any imposition on us to comply. Perhaps we will find it easier to understand this point if we remember that time, as we know it, does not apply to Allah or to His knowledge. Time on earth is a coincidental thing, by which man is able to calculate time on the basis of the succession of day and night. That a day consists of 24 hours is something determined by man. That a week consists of a succession of seven days and seven nights is also something that people have agreed. The same applies to months and years. If we were to live on some other planet, we will find that all this calculation of time is irrelevant. Even in our solar system, one night and day on one planet is equal to several years on another. Then we

have to exclude this notion of time when we speak of Allah's prior knowledge. When we are able to do so, we can easily understand that His knowledge does not constitute an imposition on us.

Having said that, however, I should add that there are certain things in our lives over which we can exercise no choice. We do not choose when we are born or when we die. Nor can we choose whether or not to react to natural elements such as rain, wind and temperature. We cannot determine how our bodies react in different situations. We are affected by illness in a way over which we exercise no control. In such matters, we earn no reward and incur no punishment. This fits with Allah's justice which attaches those to our free choice.

Moreover, Allah has placed us on earth and given it its potentials and created its environment. We can tap those potentials and make use of them, and we can deal in a limited way with the environment. What we can do through our own choosing is part of what we are responsible for. What we cannot alter has no effect on our final outcome. But we should understand, however, that our lives are affected by conditions and environmental influences which are part of Allah's system of creation. There are causes and effects. When we can influence a cause, we are responsible for the effect which results from our action. When we are influenced by a cause over which we have no control, we bear no liability.

Perhaps an element of ambiguity arises from the fact that Muslims often use such words as, "By Allah's Will," "What has been written cannot be changed," and similar phrases. These can easily be understood in the light of the foregoing, when we relate them to Allah's prior knowledge on the one hand, and to His overall will on the other. It is Allah who has willed that there be cause and effect, and it is His will that such causes as affect our lives are there to affect it. Furthermore, it is His will that we should have free will of our own. Our own will, then, is exercised within the framework of His absolute and overall will which has determined that man can have free choice of his own. The two are by no means mutually exclusive. Indeed, man's free will is a manifestation of Allah's absolute will.